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To the Editors:

Daniella Markheim berates Minnesota sugar beet farmers as “worry warts” for opposing the Central American Free Trade Agreement (Beet-industry worry-warts need not fear DR-CAFTA, July 26, 2005). Focused on ridiculing farmers, she fails to mention the most important arguments for defending the U.S. sugar supply management program by controlling imports at the border.

If Congress passes CAFTA, every sugar exporting country (at least 41) will demand increased market access, according to the most favored nation principle of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The resulting volume of sugar imports will cause U.S. sugar prices to plummet. Congress then either will allow sugar beet and sugar cane farmers to go out of business or they will compensate farmers with subsidies of questionable WTO legality to make up partially for the CAFTA depressed prices paid by agribusiness. In other words, by voting for CAFTA, Congress undermines the only commodity program that does not require billions of dollars to make up for ruinous prices for corn, soy, poultry, beef cattle and other raw materials.

Farmers want fair price for their goods from agribusiness: they don't want to depend on taxpayer funds and off-farm jobs to survive. Markheim's employer, the Heritage Foundation, depends for funding on the transnational corporate beneficiaries of taxpayer subsidies, so her ridicule of Minnesota sugar beet farmers is understandable, if reprehensible and ignorant.

The agricultural policy objective of CAFTA is to destroy the supply/demand principle that is the foundation for setting market-based prices. Why so-called free traders, such as Senator Norm Coleman and Representative Mark Kennedy, want to obliterate this fundamental market principle and crush the Minnesota sugar industry is known only to the Bush Administration and its agribusiness lobbyists that have persuaded them to vote for CAFTA.

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